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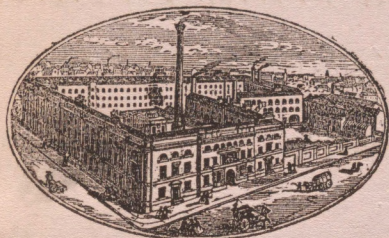
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"I AM VERY GLAD TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY OF SHAKING HANDS WITH YOU."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS LILY DALE'S RESOLUTION.



THE ladies at the Small House at Allington breakfasted always at nine,—a liberal nine ; and the postman whose duty it was to deliver letters in that village at half-past eight, being also liberal in his ideas as to time, always arrived punctually in the middle of breakfast, so that Mrs. Dale expected her letters, and Lily hers, just before their second cup of tea, as though the letters formed a part of the morning meal. Jane, the maid-servant, always brought them in, and handed them to Mrs. Dale,—for Lily had in these days come to preside at the breakfast-table ; and then there would be an examination of the outsides before the envelopes were violated, and as each knew pretty well all the circumstances of the correspondence of the other, there would be some guessing as to what this or that epistle might contain ; and after that a reading out loud of passages, and not unfrequently of the entire letter. But now, at the time of which I am speaking, Grace Crawley was at the Small House, and therefore the common practice was somewhat in abeyance.

On one of the first days of the new year Jane brought in the letters as usual, and handed them to Mrs. Dale. Lily was at the time occupied with the teapot, but still she saw the letters, and had not her hands so full as to be debarred from the expression of her usual anxiety. “Mamma, I’m sure I see two there for me,” she said. “Only one for you, Lily,” said Mrs. Dale. Lily instantly knew from the tone of the voice that some letter had come, which by the very aspect of the handwriting had disturbed her mother. “There is one for you, my dear,” said Mrs. Dale, throwing a letter across the table to Grace. “And one for

you, Lily, from Bell. The others are for me." "And whom are yours from, mamma?" asked Lily. "One is from Mrs. Jones; the other, I think, is a letter on business." Then Lily said nothing further, but she observed that her mother only opened one of her letters at the breakfast-table. Lily was very patient;—not by nature, I think, but by exercise and practice. She had, once in her life, been too much in a hurry; and having then burned herself grievously, she now feared the fire. She did not therefore follow her mother after breakfast, but sat with Grace over the fire, hemming diligently at certain articles of clothing which were intended for use in the Hoggstock parsonage. The two girls were making a set of new shirts for Mr. Crawley. "But I know he will ask where they come from," said Grace; "and then mamma will be scolded." "But I hope he'll wear them," said Lily. "Sooner or later he will," said Grace; "because mamma manages generally to have her way at last." Then they went on for an hour or so, talking about the home affairs at Hoggstock. But during the whole time Lily's mind was intent upon her mother's letter.

Nothing was said about it at lunch, and nothing when they walked out after lunch, for Lily was very patient. But during the walk Mrs. Dale became aware that her daughter was uneasy. These two watched each other unconsciously with a closeness which hardly allowed a glance of the eye, certainly not a tone of the voice, to pass unobserved. To Mrs. Dale it was everything in the world that her daughter should be, if not happy at heart, at least tranquil; and to Lily, who knew that her mother was always thinking of her, and of her alone, her mother was the only human divinity now worthy of adoration. But nothing was said about the letter during the walk.

When they came home it was nearly dusk, and it was their habit to sit up for a while without candles, talking, till the evening had in truth set in and the unmistakable and enforced idleness of remaining without candles was apparent. During this time, Lily, demanding patience of herself all the while, was thinking what she would do, or rather what she would say, about the letter. That nothing could be done or said in the presence of Grace Crawley was a matter of course, nor would she do or say anything to get rid of Grace. She would be very patient; but she would, at last, ask her mother about the letter.

And then, as luck would have it, Grace Crawley got up and left the room. Lily still waited for a few minutes, and, in order that her patience might be thoroughly exercised, she said a word or two about her sister Bell; how the eldest child's whooping-cough was nearly well, and how the baby was doing wonderful things with its first tooth. But as Mrs. Dale had already seen Bell's letter, all this was not intensely interesting.

At last Lily came to the point and asked her question. "Mamma, from whom was that other letter which you got this morning?"

Our story will perhaps be best told by communicating the letter to the reader before it was discussed with Lily. The letter was as follows:—

"General Committee Office, — January, 186—"

I should have said that Mrs. Dale had not opened the letter till she had found herself in the solitude of her own bedroom; and that then, before doing so, she had examined the handwriting with anxious eyes. When she first received it she thought she knew the writer, but was not sure. Then she had glanced at the impression over the fastening, and had known at once from whom the letter had come. It was from Mr. Crosbie, the man who had brought so much trouble into her house, who had jilted her daughter; the only man in the world whom she had a right to regard as a positive enemy to herself. She had no doubt about it, as she tore the envelope open; and yet, when the address given made her quite sure, a new feeling of shivering came upon her, and she asked herself whether it might not be better that she should send his letter back to him without reading it. But she read it.

"MADAM," the letter began,—

"You will be very much surprised to hear from me, and I am quite aware that I am not entitled to the ordinary courtesy of an acknowledgment from you, should you be pleased to throw my letter on one side as unworthy of your notice. But I cannot refrain from addressing you, and must leave it to you to reply to me or not, as you may think fit.

"I will only refer to that episode of my life with which you are acquainted, for the sake of acknowledging my great fault and of assuring you that I did not go unpunished. It would be useless for me now to attempt to explain to you the circumstances which led me into that difficulty which ended in so great a blunder; but I will ask you to believe that my folly was greater than my sin.

"But I will come to my point at once. You are, no doubt, aware that I married a daughter of Lord De Courey, and that I was separated from my wife a few weeks after our unfortunate marriage. It is now something over twelve months since she died at Baden-Baden in her mother's house. I never saw her since the day we first parted. I have not a word to say against her. The fault was mine in marrying a woman whom I did not love and had never loved. When I married Lady Alexandrina I loved, not her, but your daughter.

"I believe I may venture to say to you that your daughter once

loved me. From the day on which I last wrote to you that terrible letter which told you of my fate, I have never mentioned the name of Lily Dale to human ears. It has been too sacred for my mouth,—too sacred for the intercourse of any friendship with which I have been blessed. I now use it for the first time to you, in order that I may ask whether it be possible that her old love should ever live again. Mine has lived always,—has never faded for an hour, making me miserable during the years that have passed since I saw her, but capable of making me very happy, if I may be allowed to see her again.

“You will understand my purpose now as well as though I were to write pages. I have no scheme formed in my head for seeing your daughter again. How can I dare to form a scheme, when I am aware that the chance of success must be so strong against me? But if you will tell me that there can be a gleam of hope, I will obey any commands that you can put upon me in any way that you may point out. I am free again,—and she is free. I love her with all my heart, and seem to long for nothing in the world but that she should become my wife. Whether any of her old love may still abide with her, you will know. If it do, it may even yet prompt her to forgive one who, in spite of falseness of conduct, has yet been true to her in heart.

“I have the honour to be, Madam,

“Your most obedient servant,

“ADOLPHUS CROSBIE.”

This was the letter which Mrs. Dale had received, and as to which she had not as yet said a word to Lily, or even made up her mind whether she would say a word or not. Dearly as the mother and daughter loved each other, thorough as was the confidence between them, yet the name of Adolphus Crosbie had not been mentioned between them oftener, perhaps, than half-a-dozen times since the blow had been struck. Mrs. Dale knew that their feelings about the man were altogether different. She, herself, not only condemned him for what he had done, believing it to be impossible that any shadow of excuse could be urged for his offence, thinking that the fault had shown the man to be mean beyond redemption,—but she had allowed herself actually to hate him. He had in one sense murdered her daughter, and she believed that she could never forgive him. But Lily, as her mother well knew, had forgiven this man altogether, had made excuses for him which cleansed his sin of all its blackness in her own eyes, and was to this day anxious as ever for his welfare and his happiness. Mrs. Dale feared that Lily did in truth love him still. If it was so, was she not bound to show her this letter? Lily was old enough to judge for herself,—old enough, and wise enough too. Mrs. Dale told herself

half-a-score of times that morning that she could not be justified in keeping the letter from her daughter.

But yet she much wished that the letter had never been written, and would have given very much to be able to put it out of the way without injustice to Lily. To her thinking it would be impossible that Lily should be happy in marrying such a man. Such a marriage now would be, as Mrs. Dale thought, a degradation to her daughter. A terrible injury had been done to her; but such reparation as this would, in Mrs. Dale's eyes, only make the injury deeper. And yet Lily loved the man; and, loving him, how could she resist the temptation of his offer? "Mamma, from whom was that letter which you got this morning?" Lily asked. For a few moments Mrs. Dale remained silent. "Mamma," continued Lily, "I think I know whom it was from. If you tell me to ask nothing further, of course I will not."

"No, Lily; I cannot tell you that."

"Then, mamma, out with it at once. What is the use of shivering on the brink?"

"It was from Mr. Crosbie."

"I knew it. I cannot tell you why, but I knew it. And now, mamma;—am I to read it?"

"You shall do as you please, Lily."

"Then I please to read it."

"Listen to me a moment first. For myself, I wish that the letter had never been written. It tells badly for the man, as I think of it. I cannot understand how any man could have brought himself to address either you or me, after having acted as he acted."

"But, mamma, we differ about all that, you know."

"Now he has written, and there is the letter,—if you choose to read it."

Lily had it in her hand, but she still sat motionless, holding it.

"You think, mamma, I ought not to read it?"

"You must judge for yourself, dearest."

"And if I do not read it, what shall you do, mamma?"

"I shall do nothing;—or, perhaps, I should in such a case acknowledge it, and tell him that we have nothing more to say to him."

"That would be very stern."

"He has done that which makes some sternness necessary."

Then Lily was again silent, and still she sat motionless, with the letter in her hand. "Mamma," she said, at last, "if you tell me not to read it, I will give it you back unread. If you bid me exercise my own judgment, I shall take it upstairs and read it."

"You must exercise your own judgment," said Mrs. Dale. Then

Lily got up from her chair and walked slowly out of the room, and went to her mother's chamber. The thoughts which passed through Mrs. Dale's mind while her daughter was reading the letter were very sad. She could find no comfort anywhere. Lily, she told herself, would surely give way to this man's renewed expressions of affection, and she, Mrs. Dale herself, would be called upon to give her child to a man whom she could neither love nor respect;—whom, for aught she knew, she could never cease to hate. And she could not bring herself to believe that Lily would be happy with such a man. As for her own life, desolate as it would be,—she cared little for that. Mothers know that their daughters will leave them. Even widowed mothers, mothers with but one child left,—such a one as was this mother,—are aware that they will be left alone, and they can bring themselves to welcome the sacrifice of themselves with something of satisfaction. Mrs. Dale and Lily had, indeed, of late become bound together especially, so that the mother had been justified in regarding the link which joined them as being firmer than that by which most daughters are bound to their mothers;—but in all that she would have found no regret. Even now, in these very days, she was hoping that Lily might yet be brought to give herself to John Eames. But she could not, after all that was come and gone, be happy in thinking that Lily should be given to Adolphus Crosbie.

When Mrs. Dale went upstairs to her own room before dinner Lily was not there; nor were they alone together again that evening, except for a moment, when Lily, as was usual, went into her mother's room when she was undressing. But neither of them then said a word about the letter. Lily during dinner and throughout the evening had borne herself well, giving no sign of special emotion, keeping to herself entirely her own thoughts about the proposition made to her. And afterwards she had progressed diligently with the fabrication of Mr. Crawley's shirts, as though she had no such letter in her pocket. And yet there was not a moment in which she was not thinking of it. To Grace, just before she went to bed, she did say one word. "I wonder whether it can ever come to a person to be so placed that there can be no doing right, let what will be done;—that, do or not do, as you may, it must be wrong?"

"I hope you are not in such a condition," said Grace.

"I am something near it," said Lily, "but perhaps if I look long enough I shall see the light."

"I hope it will be a happy light at last," said Grace, who thought that Lily was referring only to John Eames.

At noon on the next day Lily had still said nothing to her mother

about the letter; and then what she said was very little. "When must you answer Mr. Crosbie, mamma?"

"When, my dear?"

"I mean how long may you take? It need not be to-day."

"No;—certainly not to-day."

"Then I will talk over it with you to-morrow. It wants some thinking;—does it not, mamma?"

"It would not want much with me, Lily."

"But then, mamma, you are not I. Believing as I believe, feeling as I feel, it wants some thinking. That's what I mean."

"I wish I could help you, my dear."

"You shall help me,—to-morrow." The morrow came and Lily was still very patient; but she had prepared herself, and had prepared the time also, so that in the hour of the gloaming she was alone with her mother, and sure that she might remain alone with her for an hour or so. "Mamma, sit there," she said; "I will sit down here, and then I can lean against you and be comfortable. You can bear as much of me as that,—can't you, mamma?" Then Mrs. Dale put her arm over Lily's shoulder, and embraced her daughter. "And now, mamma, we will talk about this wonderful letter."

"I do not know, dear, that I have anything to say about it."

"But you must have something to say about it, mamma. You must bring yourself to have something to say,—to have a great deal to say."

"You know what I think as well as though I talked for a week."

"That won't do, mamma. Come, you must not be hard with me."

"Hard, Lily!"

"I don't mean that you will hurt me, or not give me any food,—or that you will not go on caring about me more than anything else in the whole world ten times over;—" And Lily as she spoke tightened the embrace of her mother's arm round her neck. "I'm not afraid you'll be hard in that way. But you must soften your heart so as to be able to mention his name and talk about him, and tell me what I ought to do. You must see with my eyes, and hear with my ears, and feel with my heart;—and then, when I know that you have done that, I must judge with your judgment."

"I wish you to use your own."

"Yes;—because you won't see with my eyes and hear with my ears. That's what I call being hard. Though you should feed me with blood from your breast, I should call you a hard pelican, unless you could give me also the sympathy which I demand from you. You see, mamma, we have never allowed ourselves to speak of this man."

"What need has there been, dearest?"

"Only because we have been thinking of him. Out of the full heart the mouth speaketh;—that is, the mouth does so when the full heart is allowed to have its own way comfortably."

"There are things which should be forgotten."

"Forgotten, mamma!"

"The memory of which should not be fostered by much talking."

"I have never blamed you, mamma; never, even in my heart. I have known how good and gracious and sweet you have been. But I have often accused myself of cowardice because I have not allowed his name to cross my lips either to you or to Bell. To talk of forgetting such an accident as that is a farce. And as for fostering the memory of it——! Do you think that I have ever spent a night from that time to this without thinking of him? Do you imagine that I have ever crossed our own lawn, or gone down through the garden-path there, without thinking of the times when he and I walked there together? There needs no fostering for such memories as those. They are weeds which will grow rank and strong though nothing be done to foster them. There is the earth and the rain, and that is enough for them. You cannot kill them if you would, and they certainly will not die because you are careful not to hoe and rake the ground."

"Lily, you forget how short the time has been as yet."

"I have thought it very long; but the truth is, mamma, that this non-fostering of memories, as you call it, has not been the real cause of our silence. We have not spoken of Mr. Crosbie because we have not thought alike about him. Had you spoken you would have spoken with anger, and I could not endure to hear him abused. That has been it."

"Partly so, Lily."

"Now you must talk of him, and you must not abuse him. We must talk of him, because something must be done about his letter. Even if it be left unanswered, it cannot be so left without discussion. And yet you must say no evil of him."

"Am I to think that he behaved well?"

"No, mamma; you are not to think that; but you are to look upon his fault as a fault that has been forgiven."

"It cannot be forgotten, dear."

"But, mamma, when you go to heaven——"

"My dear!"

"But you will go to heaven, mamma, and why should I not speak of it? You will go to heaven, and yet I suppose you have been very wicked, because we are all very wicked. But you won't be told of your wickedness there. You won't be hated there, because you were this or that when you were here."

"I hope not, Lily; but isn't your argument almost profane?"

"No; I don't think so. We ask to be forgiven just as we forgive. That is the way in which we hope to be forgiven, and therefore it is the way in which we ought to forgive. When you say that prayer at night, mamma, do you ever ask yourself whether you have forgiven him?"

"I forgive him as far as humanity can forgive. I would do him no injury."

"But if you and I are forgiven only after that fashion we shall never get to heaven." Lily paused for some further answer from her mother, but as Mrs. Dale was silent she allowed that portion of the subject to pass as completed. "And now, mamma, what answer do you think we ought to send to his letter?"

"My dear, how am I to say? You know I have said already that if I could act on my own judgment, I would send none."

"But that was said in the bitterness of gall."

"Come, Lily, say what you think yourself. We shall get on better when you have brought yourself to speak. Do you think that you wish to see him again?"

"I don't know, mamma. Upon the whole, I think not."

"Then in heaven's name let me write and tell him so."

"Stop a moment, mamma. There are two persons here to be considered,—or rather, three."

"I would not have you think of me in such a question."

"I know you would not; but never mind, and let me go on. The three of us are concerned, at any rate; you, and he, and I. I am thinking of him now. We have all suffered, but I do believe that hitherto he has had the worst of it."

"And who has deserved the worst?"

"Mamma, how can you go back in that way? We have agreed that that should be regarded as done and gone. He has been very unhappy, and now we see what remedy he proposes to himself for his misery. Do I flatter myself if I allow myself to look at it in that way?"

"Perhaps he thinks he is offering a remedy for your misery."

As this was said Lily turned round slowly and looked up into her mother's face. "Mamma," she said, "that is very cruel. I did not think you could be so cruel. How can you, who believe him to be so selfish, think that?"

"It is very hard to judge of men's motives. I have never supposed him to be so black that he would not wish to make atonement for the evil he has done."

"If I thought that there certainly could be but one answer."

"Who can look into a man's heart and judge all the sources of his

actions? There are mixed feelings there, no doubt. Remorse for what he has done; regret for what he has lost;—something, perhaps, of the purity of love.”

“Yes, something,—I hope something,—for his sake.”

“But when a horse kicks and bites, you know his nature and do not go near him. When a man has cheated you once, you think he will cheat you again, and you do not deal with him. You do not look to gather grapes from thistles, after you have found that they are thistles.”

“I still go for the roses though I have often torn my hand with thorns in looking for them.”

“But you do not pluck those that have become cankered in the blowing.”

“Because he was once at fault, will he be cankered always?”

“I would not trust him.”

“Now, mamma, see how different we are; or, rather, how different it is when one judges for oneself or for another. If it were simply myself, and my own future fate in life, I would trust him with it all to-morrow, without a word. I should go to him as a gambler goes to the gambling-table, knowing that if I lost everything I could hardly be poorer than I was before. But I should have a better hope than the gambler is justified in having. That, however, is not my difficulty. And when I think of him I can see a prospect of success for the gambler. I think so well of myself that, loving him, as I do;—yes, mamma, do not be uneasy;—loving him, as I do, I believe I could be a comfort to him. I think that he might be better with me than without me. That is, he would be so, if he could teach himself to look back upon the past as I can do, and to judge of me as I can judge of him.”

“He has nothing, at least, for which to condemn you.”

“But he would have, were I to marry him now. He would condemn me because I had forgiven him. He would condemn me because I had borne what he had done to me, and had still loved him—loved him through it all. He would feel and know the weakness;—and there is weakness. I have been weak in not being able to rid myself of him altogether. He would recognize this after awhile, and would despise me for it. But he would not see what there is of devotion to him in my being able to bear the taunts of the world in going back to him, and your taunts, and my own taunts. I should have to bear his also,—not spoken aloud, but to be seen in his face and heard in his voice,—and that I could not endure. If he despised me, and he would, that would make us both unhappy. Therefore, mamma, tell him not to come; tell him that he can never come; but, if it be possible, tell him this tenderly.” Then she got up and walked away, as though she were

going out of the room ; but her mother had caught her before the door was opened.

"Lily," she said, "if you think you can be happy with him, he shall come."

"No, mamma, no. I have been looking for the light ever since I read his letter, and I think I see it. And now, mamma, I will make a clean breast of it. From the moment in which I heard that that poor woman was dead, I have been in a state of flutter. It has been weak of me, and silly, and contemptible. But I could not help it. I kept on asking myself whether he would ever think of me now. Well ; he has answered the question ; and has so done it that he has forced upon me the necessity of a resolution. I have resolved, and I believe that I shall be the better for it."

The letter which Mrs. Dale wrote to Mr. Crosbie, was as follows :—

"Mrs. Dale presents her compliments to Mr. Crosbie, and begs to assure him that it will not now be possible that he should renew the relations which were broken off three years ago, between him and Mrs. Dale's family." It was very short, certainly, and it did not by any means satisfy Mrs. Dale. But she did not know how to say more without saying too much. The object of her letter was to save him the trouble of a futile perseverance, and them from the annoyance of persecution ; and this she wished to do without mentioning her daughter's name. And she was determined that no word should escape her in which there was any touch of severity, any hint of an accusation. So much she owed to Lily in return for all that Lily was prepared to abandon. "There is my note," she said at last, offering it to her daughter. "I did not mean to see it," said Lily, "and, mamma, I will not read it now. Let it go. I know you have been good and have not scolded him." "I have not scolded him, certainly," said Mrs. Dale. And then the letter was sent.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MRS. DOBBS BROUGHTON'S DINNER-PARTY.

MR. JOHN EAMES, of the Income-tax Office, had in these days risen so high in the world that people in the west-end of town, and very respectable people too,—people living in South Kensington, in neighbourhoods not far from Belgravia, and in very handsome houses round Bayswater,—were glad to ask him out to dinner. Money had been left to him by an earl, and rumour had of course magnified that

money. He was a private secretary, which is in itself a great advance on being a mere clerk. And he had become the particularly intimate friend of an artist who had pushed himself into high fashion during the last year or two,—one Conway Dalrymple, whom the rich English world was beginning to pet and pelt with gilt sugar-plums, and who seemed to take very kindly to petting and gilt sugar-plums. I don't know whether the friendship of Conway Dalrymple had not done as much to secure John Eames his position at the Bayswater dinner-tables, as had either the private secretaryship, or the earl's money; and yet, when they had first known each other, now only two or three years ago, Conway Dalrymple had been the poorer man of the two. Some chance had brought them together, and they had lived in the same rooms for nearly two years. This arrangement had been broken up, and the Conway Dalrymple of these days had a studio of his own, somewhere near Kensington Palace, where he painted portraits of young countesses, and in which he had even painted a young duchess. It was the peculiar merit of his pictures,—so at least said the art-loving world,—that though the likeness was always good, the stiffness of the modern portrait was never there. There was also ever some story told in Dalrymple's pictures over and above the story of the portraiture. This countess was drawn as a fairy with wings, that countess as a goddess with a helmet. The thing took for a time, and Conway Dalrymple was picking up his gilt sugar-plums with considerable rapidity.

On a certain day he and John Eames were to dine out together at a certain house in that Bayswater district. It was a large mansion, if not made of stone yet looking very stony, with thirty windows at least, all of them with cut-stone frames, requiring, let me say, at least four thousand a year for its maintenance. And its owner, Dobbs Broughton, a man very well known both in the City and over the grass in Northamptonshire, was supposed to have a good deal more than four thousand a year. Mrs. Dobbs Broughton, a very beautiful woman, who certainly was not yet thirty-five, let her worst enemies say what they might, had been painted by Conway Dalrymple as a Grace. There were, of course, three Graces in the picture, but each Grace was Mrs. Dobbs Broughton repeated. We all know how Graces stand sometimes; two Graces looking one way, and one the other. In this picture, Mrs. Dobbs Broughton as centre Grace looked you full in the face. The same lady looked away from you, displaying her left shoulder as one side Grace, and displaying her right shoulder as the other side Grace. For this pretty toy Mr. Conway Dalrymple had picked up a gilt sugar-plum to the tune of six hundred pounds, and had, moreover, won the heart both of Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs Broughton. "Upon my word, Johnny," Dalrymple had

said to his friend, "he's a deuced good fellow, has really a good glass of claret,—which is getting rarer and rarer every day,—and will mount you for a day, whenever you please, down at Market Harboro'. Come and dine with them." Johnny Eames condescended, and did go and dine with Mr. Dobbs Broughton. I wonder whether he remembered, when Conway Dalrymple was talking of the rarity of good claret, how much beer the young painter used to drink when they were out together in the country, as they used to be occasionally, three years ago; and how the painter had then been used to complain that bitter beer cost three-pence a glass, instead of twopence, which had hitherto been the recognized price of the article. In those days the sugar-plums had not been gilt, and had been much rarer.

Johnny Eames and his friend went together to the house of Mr. Dobbs Broughton. As Dalrymple lived close to the Broughtons, Eames picked him up in a cab. "Filthy things, these cabs are," said Dalrymple, as he got into the Hansom.

"I don't know about that," said Johnny. "They're pretty good, I think."

"Foul things," said Conway. "Don't you feel what a draught comes in here because the glass is cracked. I'd have one of my own, only I should never know what to do with it."

"The greatest nuisance on earth, I should think," said Johnny.

"If you could always have it standing ready round the corner," said the artist, "it would be delightful. But one would want half a dozen horses, and two or three men for that."

"I think the stands are the best," said Johnny.

They were a little late,—a little later than they should have been had they considered that Eames was to be introduced to his new acquaintances. But he had already lived long enough before the world to be quite at his ease in such circumstances, and he entered Mrs. Broughton's drawing-room with his pleasantest smile upon his face. But as he entered he saw a sight which made him look serious in spite of his efforts to the contrary. Mr. Adolphus Crosbie, secretary to the Board at the General Committee Office, was standing on the rug before the fire.

"Who will be there?" Eames had asked of his friend, when the suggestion to go and dine with Dobbs Broughton had been made to him.

"Impossible to say," Conway had replied. "A certain horrible fellow of the name of Musselboro, will almost certainly be there. He always is when they have anything of a swell dinner-party. He is a sort of partner of Broughton's in the city. He wears a lot of chains, and has elaborate whiskers, and an elaborate waistcoat, which is worse; and he doesn't wash his hands as often as he ought to do."

"An objectionable party, rather, I should say," said Eames.

"Well, yes; Musselboro is objectionable. He's very good-humoured you know, and good-looking in a sort of way, and goes everywhere; that is among people of this sort. Of course he's not hand-and-glove with Lord Derby; and I wish he could be made to wash his hands. They haven't any other standing dish, and you may meet anybody. They always have a Member of Parliament; they generally manage to catch a Baronet; and I have met a Peer there. On that august occasion Musselboro was absent."

So instructed, Eames, on entering the room, looked round at once for Mr. Musselboro. "If I don't see the whiskers and chain," he had said, "I shall know there's a Peer." Mr. Musselboro was in the room, but Eames had descried Mr. Crosbie long before he had seen Mr. Musselboro.

There was no reason for confusion on his part in meeting Crosbie. They had both loved Lily Dale. Crosbie might have been successful, but for his own fault. Eames had on one occasion been thrown into contact with him, and on that occasion had quarrelled with him and had beaten him, giving him a black eye, and in this way obtaining some mastery over him. There was no reason why he should be ashamed of meeting Crosbie; and yet, when he saw him, the blood mounted all over his face, and he forgot to make any further search for Mr. Musselboro.

"I am so much obliged to Mr. Dalrymple for bringing you," said Mrs. Dobbs Broughton very sweetly, "only he ought to have come sooner. Naughty man! I know it was his fault. Will you take Miss Demolines down? Miss Demolines,—Mr. Eames."

Mr. Dobbs Broughton was somewhat sulky and had not welcomed our hero very cordially. He was beginning to think that Conway Dalrymple gave himself airs and did not sufficiently understand that a man who had horses at Market Harboro' and '41 Lafitte was at any rate as good as a painter who was pelted with gilt sugar-plums for painting countesses. But he was a man whose ill-humour never lasted long, and he was soon pressing his wine on Johnny Eames as though he loved him dearly.

But there was yet a few minutes before they went down to dinner, and Johnny Eames, as he endeavoured to find something to say to Miss Demolines,—which was difficult, as he did not in the least know Miss Demolines' line of conversation,—was aware that his efforts were impeded by thoughts of Mr. Crosbie. The man looked older than when he had last seen him,—so much older that Eames was astonished. He was bald, or becoming bald; and his whiskers were grey, or were

becoming grey, and he was much fatter. Johnny Eames, who was always thinking of Lily Dale, could not now keep himself from thinking of Adolphus Crosbie. He saw at a glance that the man was in mourning, though there was nothing but his shirt-studs by which to tell it; and he knew that he was in mourning for his wife. "I wish she might have lived for ever," Johnny said to himself.

He had not yet been definitely called upon by the entrance of the servant to offer his arm to Miss Demolines, when Crosbie walked across to him from the rug and addressed him.

"Mr. Eames," said he, "it is some time since we met." And he offered his hand to Johnny.

"Yes, it is," said Johnny, accepting the proffered salutation. "I don't know exactly how long, but ever so long."

"I am very glad to have the opportunity of shaking hands with you," said Crosbie; and then he retired, as it had become his duty to wait with his arm ready for Mrs. Dobbs Broughton. Having married an earl's daughter he was selected for that honour. There was a barrister in the room, and Mrs. Dobbs Broughton ought to have known better. As she professed to be guided in such matters by the rules laid down by the recognized authorities, she ought to have been aware that a man takes no rank from his wife. But she was entitled I think to merciful consideration for her error. A woman situated as was Mrs. Dobbs Broughton cannot altogether ignore these terrible rules. She cannot let her guests draw lots for precedence. She must select some one for the honour of her own arm. And amidst the intricacies of rank how is it possible for a woman to learn and to remember everything? If Providence would only send Mrs. Dobbs Broughton a Peer for every dinner-party, the thing would go more easily; but what woman will tell me, off-hand, which should go out of a room first; a C.B., an Admiral of the Blue, the Dean of Barchester, or the Dean of Arches? Who is to know who was everybody's father? How am I to remember that young Thompson's progenitor was made a baronet and not a knight when he was Lord Mayor? Perhaps Mrs. Dobbs Broughton ought to have known that Mr. Crosbie could have gained nothing by his wife's rank, and the barrister may be considered to have been not immoderately severe when he simply spoke of her afterwards as the silliest and most ignorant old woman he had ever met in his life. Eames with the lovely Miss Demolines on his arm was the last to move before the hostess. Mr. Dobbs Broughton had led the way energetically with old Lady Demolines. There was no doubt about Lady Demolines,—as his wife had told him, because her title marked her. Her husband had been a physician in Paris, and had been knighted in consequence of

some benefit supposed to have been done to some French scion of royalty,—when such scions in France were royal and not imperial. Lady Demolines' rank was not much, certainly; but it served to mark her, and was beneficial.

As he went downstairs Eames was still thinking of his meeting with Crosbie, and had as yet hardly said a word to his neighbour, and his neighbour had not said a word to him. Now Johnny understood dinners quite well enough to know that in a party of twelve, among whom six are ladies, everything depends on your next neighbour, and generally on the next neighbour who specially belongs to you; and as he took his seat he was a little alarmed as to his prospect for the next two hours. On his other hand sat Mrs. Ponsonby, the barrister's wife, and he did not much like the look of Mrs. Ponsonby. She was fat, heavy, and good-looking; with a broad space between her eyes, and light smooth hair;—a youthful British matron every inch of her, of whom any barrister with a young family of children might be proud. Now Miss Demolines, though she was hardly to be called beautiful, was at any rate remarkable. She had large, dark, well-shaped eyes, and very dark hair, which she wore tangled about in an extraordinary manner, and she had an expressive face,—a face made expressive by the owner's will. Such power of expression is often attained by dint of labour,—though it never reaches to the expression of anything in particular. She was almost sufficiently good-looking to be justified in considering herself to be a beauty.

But Miss Demolines, though she had said nothing as yet, knew her game very well. A lady cannot begin conversation to any good purpose in the drawing-room, when she is seated and the man is standing;—nor can she know then how the table may subsequently arrange itself. Powder may be wasted, and often is wasted, and the spirit rebels against the necessity of commencing a second enterprise. But Miss Demolines, when she found herself seated, and perceived that on the other side of her was Mr. Ponsonby, a married man, commenced her enterprise at once, and our friend John Eames was immediately aware that he would have no difficulty as to conversation.

“Don't you like winter dinner-parties?” began Miss Demolines. This was said just as Johnny was taking his seat, and he had time to declare that he liked dinner-parties at all periods of the year if the dinner was good and the people pleasant before the host had muttered something which was intended to be understood to be a grace. “But I mean especially in winter,” continued Miss Demolines. “I don't think daylight should ever be admitted at a dinner-table; and though you may shut out the daylight, you can't shut out the heat. And

then there are always so many other things to go to in May and June and July. Dinners should be stopped by Act of Parliament for those three months. I don't care what people do afterwards, because we always fly away on the first of August."

"That is good-natured on your part."

"I'm sure what I say would be for the good of society;—but at this time of the year a dinner is warm and comfortable."

"Very comfortable, I think."

"And people get to know each other;"—in saying which Miss Demolines looked very pleasantly up into Johnny's face.

"There is a great deal in that," said he. "I wonder whether you and I will get to know each other?"

"Of course we shall;—that is, if I'm worth knowing."

"There can be no doubt about that, I should say."

"Time alone can tell. But, Mr. Eames, I see that Mr. Crosbie is a friend of yours."

"Hardly a friend."

"I know very well that men are friends when they step up and shake hands with each other. It is the same as when women kiss."

"When I see women kiss, I always think that there is deep hatred at the bottom of it."

"And there may be deep hatred between you and Mr. Crosbie for anything I know to the contrary," said Miss Demolines.

"The very deepest," said Johnny, pretending to look grave.

"Ah; then I know he is your bosom friend, and that you will tell him anything I say. What a strange history that was of his marriage!"

"So I have heard;—but he is not quite bosom friend enough with me to have told me all the particulars. I know that his wife is dead."

"Dead; oh, yes; she has been dead these two years I should say."

"Not so long as that, I should think."

"Well,—perhaps not. But it's ever so long ago;—quite long enough for him to be married again. Did you know her?"

"I never saw her in my life."

"I knew her,—not well indeed; but I am intimate with her sister, Lady Amelia Gazebee, and I have met her there. None of that family have married what you may call well. And now, Mr. Eames, pray look at the menu and tell me what I am to eat. Arrange for me a little dinner of my own, out of the great bill of fare provided. I always expect some gentleman to do that for me. Mr. Crosbie, you know, only lived with his wife for one month."

"So I've been told."

"And a terrible month they had of it. I used to hear of it. He doesn't look that sort of man, does he?"

"Well;—no. I don't think he does. But what sort of man do you mean?"

"Why, such a regular Bluebeard! Of course you know how he treated another girl before he married Lady Alexandrina. She died of it, —with a broken heart; absolutely died; and there he is, indifferent as possible;—and would treat me in the same way to-morrow if I would let him."

Johnny Eames, finding it impossible to talk to Miss Demolines about Lily Dale, took up the card of the dinner and went to work in earnest, recommending his neighbour what to eat and what to pass by. "But you've skipped the pâté," she said, with energy.

"Allow me to ask you to choose mine for me instead. You are much more fit to do it." And she did choose his dinner for him.

They were sitting at a round table, and in order that the ladies and gentlemen should alternate themselves properly, Mr. Musselboro was opposite to the host. Next to him on his right was old Mrs. Van Siever, the widow of a Dutch merchant, who was very rich. She was a ghastly thing to look at, as well from the quantity as from the nature of the wiggeries which she wore. She had not only a false front, but long false curls, as to which it cannot be conceived that she would suppose that any one would be ignorant as to their falseness. She was very thin, too, and very small, and putting aside her wiggeries, you would think her to be all eyes. She was a ghastly old woman to the sight, and not altogether pleasant in her mode of talking. She seemed to know Mr. Musselboro very well, for she called him by his name without any prefix. He had, indeed, begun life as a clerk in her husband's office.

"Why doesn't What's-his-name have real silver forks?" she said to him. Now Mrs. What's-his-name,—Mrs. Dobbs Broughton we will call her,—was sitting on the other side of Mr. Musselboro, between him and Mr. Crosbie; and, so placed, Mr. Musselboro found it rather hard to answer the question, more especially as he was probably aware that other questions would follow.

"What's the use?" said Mr. Musselboro. "Everybody has these plated things now. What's the use of a lot of capital lying dead?"

"Everybody doesn't. I don't. You know as well as I do, Musselboro, that the appearance of the thing goes for a great deal. Capital isn't lying dead as long as people know that you've got it."

Before answering this Mr. Musselboro was driven to reflect that Mrs. Dobbs Broughton would probably hear his reply. "You won't find that there is any doubt on that head in the City as to Broughton," he said.

"I shan't ask in the City, and if I did, I should not believe what

people told me. I think there are sillier folks in the City than anywhere else. What did he give for that picture upstairs which the young man painted?"

"What, Mrs. Dobbs Broughton's portrait?"

"You don't call that a portrait, do you? I mean the one with the three naked women?" Mr. Musselboro glanced round with one eye, and felt sure that Mrs. Dobbs Broughton had heard the question. But the old woman was determined to have an answer. "How much did he give for it, Musselboro?"

"Six hundred pounds, I believe," said Mr. Musselboro, looking straight before him as he answered, and pretending to treat the subject with perfect indifference.

"Did he indeed, now? Six hundred pounds! And yet he hasn't got silver spoons. How things are changed! Tell me, Musselboro, who was that young man who came in with the painter?"

Mr. Musselboro turned round and asked Mrs. Broughton. "A Mr. John Eames, Mrs. Van Siever," said Mrs. Broughton, whispering across the front of Mr. Musselboro. "He is private secretary to Lord—Lord—Lord—I forget who. Some one of the Ministers, I know. And he had a great fortune left him the other day by Lord—Lord—Lord somebody else."

"All among the lords, I see," said Mrs. Van Siever. Then Mrs. Dobbs Broughton drew herself back, remembering some little attack which had been made on her by Mrs. Van Siever when she herself had had the real lord to dine with her.

There was a Miss Van Siever there also, sitting between Crosbie and Conway Dalrymple. Conway Dalrymple had been specially brought there to sit next to Miss Van Siever. "There's no knowing how much she'll have," said Mrs. Dobbs Broughton, in the warmth of her friendship. "But it's all real. It is, indeed. The mother is awfully rich."

"But she's awful in another way, too," said Dalrymple.

"Indeed she is, Conway." Mrs. Dobbs Broughton had got into a way of calling her young friend by his Christian name. "All the world calls him Conway," she had said to her husband once when her husband caught her doing so. "She is awful. Her husband made the business in the City, when things were very different from what they are now, and I can't help having her. She has transactions of business with Dobbs. But there's no mistake about the money."

"She needn't leave it to her daughter, I suppose?"

"But why shouldn't she? She has nobody else. You might offer to paint her, you know. She'd make an excellent picture. So much character. You come and see her."

Conway Dalrymple had expressed his willingness to meet Miss Van Siever, saying something, however, as to his present position being one which did not admit of any matrimonial speculation. Then Mrs. Dobbs Broughton had told him, with much seriousness, that he was altogether wrong, and that were he to forget himself, or commit himself, or misbehave himself, there must be an end to their pleasant intimacy. In answer to which, Mr. Dalrymple had said that his Grace was surely of all Graces the least gracious. And now he had come to meet Miss Van Siever, and was seated next to her at table.

Miss Van Siever, who at this time had perhaps reached her twenty-fifth year, was certainly a handsome young woman. She was fair and large, bearing no likeness whatever to her mother. Her features were regular, and her full, clear eyes had a brilliance of their own, looking at you always stedfastly and boldly, though very seldom pleasantly. Her mouth would have been beautiful had it not been too strong for feminine beauty. Her teeth were perfect,—too perfect,—looking like miniature walls of carved ivory. She knew the fault of this perfection, and shewed her teeth as little as she could. Her nose and chin were finely chiselled, and her head stood well upon her shoulders. But there was something hard about it all which repelled you. Dalrymple, when he saw her, recoiled from her, not outwardly, but inwardly. Yes, she was handsome, as may be a horse or a tiger; but there was about her nothing of feminine softness. He could not bring himself to think of taking Clara Van Siever as the model that was to sit before him for the rest of his life. He certainly could make a picture of her, as had been suggested by his friend, Mrs. Broughton, but it must be as Judith with the dissevered head, or as Jael using her hammer over the temple of Sisera. Yes,—he thought she would do as Jael; and if Mrs. Van Siever would throw him a sugar-plum,—for he would want the sugar-plum, seeing that any other result was out of the question,—the thing might be done. Such was the idea of Mr. Conway Dalrymple respecting Miss Van Siever,—before he led her down to dinner.

At first he found it hard to talk to her. She answered him, and not with monosyllables. But she answered him without sympathy, or apparent pleasure in talking. Now the young artist was in the habit of being flattered by ladies, and expected to have his small talk made very easy for him. He liked to give himself little airs, and was not generally disposed to labour very hard at the task of making himself agreeable.

“Were you ever painted yet?” he asked her after they had both been sitting silent for two or three minutes.

"Was I ever—ever painted? In what way?"

"I don't mean rouged, or enamelled, or got up by Madame Rachel; but have you ever had your portrait taken?"

"I have been photographed,—of course."

"That's why I asked you if you had been painted,—so as to make some little distinction between the two. I am a painter by profession, and do portraits."

"So Mrs. Broughton told me."

"I am not asking for a job, you know."

"I am quite sure of that."

"But I should have thought you would have been sure to have sat to somebody."

"I never did. I never thought of doing so. One does those things at the instigation of one's intimate friends,—fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts, and the like."

"Or husbands, perhaps,—or lovers?"

"Well, yes; my intimate friend is my mother, and she would never dream of such a thing. She hates pictures."

"Hates pictures!"

"And especially portraits. And I'm afraid, Mr. Dalrymple, she hates artists."

"Good heavens; how cruel! I suppose there is some story attached to it. There has been some fatal likeness,—some terrible picture,—something in her early days?"

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Dalrymple. It is merely the fact that her sympathies are with ugly things, rather than with pretty things. I think she loves the mahogany dinner-table better than anything else in the house; and she likes to have everything dark, and plain, and solid."

"And good?"

"Good of its kind, certainly."

"If everybody was like your mother, how would the artists live?"

"There would be none."

"And the world, you think, would be none the poorer?"

"I did not speak of myself. I think the world would be very much the poorer. I am very fond of the ancient masters, though I do not suppose that I understand them."

"They are easier understood than the modern, I can tell you. Perhaps you don't care for modern pictures?"

"Not in comparison, certainly. If that is uncivil, you have brought it on yourself. But I do not in truth mean anything derogatory to the painters of the day. When their pictures are old, they,—that is the good ones among them,—will be nice also."

"Pictures are like wine, and want age, you think?"

"Yes, and statues too, and buildings above all things. The colours of new paintings are so glaring, and the faces are so bright and self-conscious, that they look to me when I go to the exhibition like coloured prints in a child's new picture-book. It is the same thing with buildings. One sees all the points, and nothing is left to the imagination."

"I find I have come across a real critic."

"I hope, at any rate, I am not a sham one;" and Miss Van Siever as she said this looked very savage.

"I shouldn't take you to be a sham in anything."

"Ah, that would be saying a great deal for myself. Who can undertake to say that he is not a sham in anything?"

As she said this the ladies were getting up. So Miss Van Siever also got up, and left Mr. Conway Dalrymple to consider whether he could say or could think of himself that he was not a sham in anything. As regarded Miss Clara Van Siever, he began to think that he should not object to paint her portrait, even though there might be no sugar-plum. He would certainly do it as Jael; and he would, if he dared, insert dimly in the background some idea of the face of the mother, half-appearing, half-vanishing, as the spirit of the sacrifice. He was composing his picture, while Mr. Dobbs Broughton was arranging himself and his bottles.

"Musselboro," he said, "I'll come up between you and Crosbie. Mr. Eames, though I run away from you, the claret shall remain; or, rather, it shall flow backwards and forwards as rapidly as you will."

"I'll keep it moving," said Johnny.

"Do; there's a good fellow. It's a nice glass of wine, isn't it? Old Ramsby, who keeps as good a stock of stuff as any wine-merchant in London, gave me a hint, three or four years ago, that he'd a lot of tidy Bordeaux. It's '41, you know. He had ninety dozen, and I took it all."

"What was the figure, Broughton?" said Crosbie, asking the question which he knew was expected.

"Well, I only gave one hundred and four for it then; it's worth a hundred and twenty now. I wouldn't sell a bottle of it for any money. Come, Dalrymple, pass it round; but fill your glass first."

"Thank you, no; I don't like it. I'll drink sherry."

"Don't like it!" said Dobbs Broughton.

"It's strange, isn't it? but I don't."

"I thought you particularly told me to drink his claret?" said Johnny to his friend afterwards.

"So I did," said Conway; "and wonderfully good wine it is. But

I make it a rule never to eat or drink anything in a man's house when he praises it himself and tells me the price of it."

"And I make it a rule never to cut the nose off my own face," said Johnny.

Before they went, Johnny Eames had been specially invited to call on Lady Demolines, and had said that he would do so. "We live in Porchester Gardens," said Miss Demolines. "Upon my word, I believe that the farther London stretches in that direction, the farther mamma will go. She thinks the air so much better. I know it's a long way."

"Distance is nothing to me," said Johnny; "I can always set off over night."

Conway Dalrymple did not get invited to call on Mrs. Van Siever, but before he left the house he did say a word or two more to his friend Mrs. Broughton as to Clara Van Siever. "She is a fine young woman," he said; "she is indeed."

"You have found it out, have you?"

"Yes, I have found it out. I do not doubt that some day she'll murder her husband or her mother, or startle the world by some newly-invented crime; but that only makes her the more interesting."

"And when you add to that all the old woman's money," said Mrs. Dobbs Broughton, "you think that she might do?"

"For a picture, certainly. I'm speaking of her simply as a model. Could we not manage it? Get her once here, without her mother knowing it, or Broughton, or any one. I've got the subject,—Jael and Sisera, you know. I should like to put Musselboro in as Sisera, with the nail half driven in." Mrs. Dobbs Broughton declared that the scheme was a great deal too wicked for her participation, but at last she promised to think of it.

"You might as well come up and have a cigar," Dalrymple said, as he and his friend left Mr. Broughton's house. Johnny said that he would go up and have a cigar or two. "And now tell me what you think of Mrs. Dobbs Broughton and her set," said Conway.

"Well; I'll tell you what I think of them. I think they stink of money, as the people say; but I'm not sure that they've got any all the same."

"I should suppose he makes a large income."

"Very likely, and perhaps spends more than he makes. A good deal of it looked to me like make-believe. There's no doubt about the claret, but the champagne was execrable. A man is a criminal to have such stuff handed round to his guests. And there isn't the ring of real gold about the house."

"I hate the ring of the gold, as you call it," said the artist.

"So do I,—I hate it like poison; but if it is there, I like it to be true. There is a sort of persons going now,—and one meets them out here and there every day of one's life,—who are downright Brummagem to the ear and to the touch and to the sight, and we recognize them as such at the very first moment. My honoured lord and master, Sir Raffle, is one such. There is no mistaking him. Clap him down upon the counter, and he rings dull and untrue at once. Pardon me, my dear Conway, if I say the same of your excellent friend Mr. Dobbs Broughton."

"I think you go a little too far, but I don't deny it. What you mean is, that he's not a gentleman."

"I mean a great deal more than that. Bless you, when you come to talk of a gentleman, who is to define the word? How do I know whether or no I'm a gentleman myself. When I used to be in Burton Crescent, I was hardly a gentleman then,—sitting at the same table with Mrs Roper and the Lupekes;—do you remember them, and the lovely Amelia?"

"I suppose you were a gentleman, then, as well as now."

"You, if you had been painting duchesses then, with a studio in Kensington Gardens, would not have said so, if you had happened to come across me. I can't define a gentleman, even in my own mind;—but I can define the sort of man with whom I think I can live pleasantly."

"And poor Dobbs doesn't come within the line?"

"N—o, not quite; a very nice fellow, I'm quite sure, and I'm very much obliged to you for taking me there."

"I never will take you to any house again. And what did you think of his wife?"

"That's a horse of another colour altogether. A pretty woman with such a figure as hers has got a right to be anything she pleases. I see you are a great favourite."

"No, I'm not;—not especially. I do like her. She wants to make up a match between me and that Miss Van Siever. Miss Van is to have gold by the ingot, and jewels by the bushel, and a hatful of bank shares, and a whole mine in Cornwall, for her fortune."

"And is very handsome into the bargain."

"Yes; she's handsome."

"So is her mother," said Johnny. "If you take the daughter, I'll take the mother, and see if I can't do you out of a mine or two. Good-night, old fellow. I'm only joking about old Dobbs. I'll go and dine there again to-morrow, if you like it."

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